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THE SITUATION IN BURUNDI

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Letter dated 25 September 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

In addition to the decision by the new regime to re-establish the National Assembly and authorize political parties to operate (see my letter of 13 September 1996 addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/1996/750)), I have the honour to reconfirm to you the message that I communicated to the President of the Council and to you through the most appropriate channel: the Government of Burundi has officially announced that it is prepared and determined to embark on negotiations with the armed factions. In that connection, His Excellency Mr. Pierre Buyoya, President of the Republic of Burundi, acting on his own initiative, placed a telephone call on 23 September 1996 to His Excellency Mwalimu Julius Nyerere to reiterate that decision to him.

This very important development makes it clear that there is no longer any justification whatsoever for either the Security Council, the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, the States of the Great Lakes region, or any other person acting as facilitator or mediator to further delay the lifting of the economic blockade which has been declared against Burundi and which is in every respect contrary to the Charter of the United Nations, the Charter of the Organization of African Unity and to international law as a whole. In this context, in conformity with the instructions of my Government I am sending you a document which gives a brief account of the adverse effects of the economic embargo on the people of Burundi.

I should be very grateful if you would have it circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 43, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Nsanze TERENCE
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Annex

Statement issued in September 1996 by the Prime Minister of Burundi concerning the adverse effects of the embargo declared against Burundi

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Following the change that occurred on 25 July 1996, the heads of State and Government of the subregion (Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire) met in Arusha on 31 July 1996 to consider the new situation that had been created in Burundi. At the close of that meeting, they declared an embargo which proved to be a complete blockade against Burundi.

2. The people of Burundi who had placed great hopes in the change feel this decision to be unjust and unwarranted, particularly since it has been taken at a time when there are signs of a return to peace and in violation of all international principles on the subject. With regard to the latter, we could mention, inter alia, the right of peoples to self-determination, sovereignty and equality among States, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, non-use of force and peaceful settlement of international disputes, freedom of transit and trade for all States, particularly landlocked States.

3. The return to constitutional legality, namely, the restoration of the National Assembly and of the activities of political parties, and the immediate and unconditional negotiations with armed groups are some of the conditions required for the lifting of this blockade.

4. The transitional Government has just officially lifted the suspension on the activities of the National Assembly and of political parties. Furthermore, it has already expressed its commitment to opening a dialogue with the armed groups. These decisions invalidate the reasons which have been cited for imposing these sanctions.

II. ADVERSE EFFECTS OF THE EMBARGO

(a) At the political and diplomatic level

5. The embargo has had the effect of further radicalizing extreme positions, particularly the rebellion, which feels supported and encouraged. Rebel forces are intensifying their attacks, which are directed primarily against vulnerable persons such as children, women, the elderly and other peaceable citizens, such as members of religious orders.

6. The embargo has deprived Government authorities of any political or diplomatic contacts. The same is true for citizens of Burundi, whose movements are blocked when they try to leave or enter the country. By contrast, the rebel leaders and former dignitaries living abroad travel the world for purposes of political and diplomatic propaganda to increase the country's isolation.

(b) At the economic level

7. The effects of the embargo are apparent in all sectors of the national economy. National output will fall by 30 per cent for food crops, 10 per cent for commercial crops, 24 per cent for stock-raising and 30 per cent for manufacturing. The balance of payments for the rest of 1996 will show a shortfall of FBu 25 billion and the country's monetary situation will deteriorate. Inflation has already reached 40 per cent.

8. The total value of the economy's losses is estimated at over FBu 41 billion, or about US$ 127 million. The value of the losses in agriculture and stock-raising amounts to nearly 50 per cent. This will considerably reduce the income of small-scale farmers, with all of the resulting negative implications for the population's living conditions and food security.

(c) At the social level

9. The social consequences of the embargo are very serious. Since the capacity of the State and humanitarian agencies has diminished, children, women and old people who make up 80 per cent of the affected populations will be the first to suffer.

10. Epidemiological diseases which used to be kept at bay through prevention campaigns will wreak untold damage on Burundi and the populations of neighbouring countries. The situation will be exacerbated by famine and malnutrition.

11. The embargo will mean that a number of schoolchildren and students will be forced to abandon their education, either because the shortage of essential fuel supplies will prevent them from going about their normal business or because school equipment will be impossible to obtain.

12. A number of businesses are slowing down production or closing altogether. Workers are unemployed and losing their income and their jobs, and 12 major businesses in the capital have already laid off 60 per cent of their workforce. This could eventually become a source of insecurity.

(d) Conclusion

13. To sum up, if the blockade ordered by the countries of the subregion continues, the chances of achieving peace, reconciliation and economic and social recovery will decrease. The Government has proposed a peace programme. Measures designed to bring about peace have already been taken; these measures are in step with the avowed intentions of the initiators of the blockade. If neighbouring countries wish to avoid contributing to the disintegration of the nation of Burundi, they should consider their responsibilities and lift this embargo immediately.